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—
Chair

Mr. Gary Schellenberger

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• (0910)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andy Scott (Fredericton, Lib.)): Good morning. *Bienvenue tout le monde.*

I call to order the 71st meeting of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. Pursuant to Standing Orders 110 and 111, we are reviewing the order in council appointment of Tom Perlmutter to the position of government film commissioner of the National Film Board of Canada, referred to the committee on May 31, 2007.

Without further ado, I would ask our witness to make his opening comments, and then we'll have an opportunity to discuss these things with him as a committee.

Thank you. *Merci.*

Mr. Tom Perlmutter (Government Film Commissioner designate of the National Film Board, As an Individual): *Merci.*

Mr. Chair, members of the committee, I'm pleased to be here with you today as the new government film commissioner and chair of the National Film Board. I'm deeply honoured to have been entrusted with the governance of such a vibrant and dynamic cultural institution.

[Translation]

The National Film Board of Canada is a unique cultural institution in Canada, and I would even say in the world. Its mandate is to produce and distribute innovative and relevant media works that reflect the points of view and values of Canadian society.

But the National Film Board of Canada is much more than that. Through its active collaboration with the education sector—close to half of our distribution revenues come from the educational market—there is always great demand in this area. Also, we have all kinds of school visits to our mediatheque in Toronto and CineRobotheque in Montreal.

Through its partnerships with public libraries and its public viewings, the NFB reaches out to Canadians, encourages discussion and stirs up debates on subjects of importance to Canadians.

The NFB gives filmmakers from across the country the opportunity to express themselves. It pays special attention to artists from under-served communities, particularly young filmmakers from aboriginal communities, ethnocultural communities and minority language groups. Current initiatives include Yukon Vérité, a mentoring program through the NFB and the Yukon Film and Sound Commission. The Nunavut Animation Lab is a collaboration

between the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation, a northern broadcaster, and the Government of Nunavut.

By adapting the Challenge for Change program to the digital age, we are stretching the boundaries of the documentary format while encouraging the creativity of those who, even in this day and age of easy access to the media, do not have an opportunity to make themselves heard. The results are projects such as Filmmaker-in-Residence, in which a filmmaker joins the medical team in a downtown Toronto hospital and works with disadvantaged communities to give a whole new view. Jeff Lauzon, president of St. Michael's Hospital, the hospital in question, saw this project as another way to fulfil his mandate, but for us, it is also a mandate to give a creative voice to people who have never had one.

There is also Wapikoni Mobile, a travelling film studio that visits isolated aboriginal communities in Quebec. In four years it has produced more than 500 films, has won awards throughout the world and has now been invited to serve as a model for communities in Brazil, Australia and elsewhere in the world.

I am particularly proud of the projects recently developed to promote creation by people with disabilities.

[English]

Last February, we announced a joint initiative with the CFTPA, which is the private producers association of English Canada. The NFB mediamakers mentorship program offers on-the-job training opportunities in the film, television, and interactive media industry to Canadians with disabilities.

This comes after a long period of work that we've been doing within the film board of not just doing films about the disabled but saying that the disabled are creators. They have a lot to offer our society. They've been excluded. We need their voices.

The film board also ensures that Canadian stories, our stories, are told to the world. With proactive distribution activities and the development of strategic international partnerships, we ensure that Canadian perspectives are shared with the world.

Let's not forget how proud we all felt this past March when Torill Kove accepted the Oscar for *The Danish Poet*.

This year alone, and we're only halfway through the year, the NFB has brought home an Oscar; two awards—Cannes' only awards—from the Cannes film festival for an animation film, *Madame Tutli-Putli*; and a GSM award in Barcelona, which is considered the Oscar of the mobile world. It's for films for mobile platforms. We got that for original mobile content. We received the first ever Rockie for original mobile content, a Canadian New Media Award, and we picked up the top two awards for feature documentaries at Hot Docs this year. In the second edition of the International Interactive Emmy Awards, we've been nominated there. We received the prestigious FOCAL International Award for conservation.

That's only a partial list, by the way. And that's, by anyone's reckoning, a phenomenal achievement for Canada. This is a phenomenal thing for Canadians to be proud of.

I always think that if it takes a village to nurture a child, it takes a whole country to nurture its cultural institutions. I think it takes the kind of effort in which we are engaged here, and in which you engage daily in your work, to be able to support the kind of effort that makes a profound difference, it seems to me, in the lives of Canadians, that gives real value back to Canadians in ways that go far beyond culture.

Henry Mintzberg, who is one of our most noted management gurus, wrote about what pride means, and it's not simply an empty notion. When we have pride in our achievements, what it does is send a message of possibility. It says that we are capable of anything, that we open doors to people who may never have thought that there were possibilities.

And it's not necessarily only in the cultural industry. For someone, whether it's in Nunavut or in the Northwest Territories or in Fredericton, to say we've picked up awards at Cannes, we've won an Oscar and I have a dream, I can follow that dream, I can create whatever it is.... It may be in engineering. It may be in medicine. It may be in the arts. It's because of this realm of possibility that what we do is so important as well.

You've had the opportunity to review my resumé, and you can see from my background as a writer, independent producer, and finally, for the past five years, as the director general of English programming at the film board, that I've been deeply committed to the vision of John Grierson, who was the founding film commissioner and the father of documentary filmmaking. But he was also the man who invited Norman McLaren to join the film board, who had a vision of what creation is in the larger fashion. And he continues to inspire us. He certainly did as an independent filmmaker and producer.

Before I joined the film board, coming from the independent sector, I thought a lot about what the role of this public sector institution was. I actually wrote for myself a strategic paper, as it were, on my reflections. At that time I came up with a simple concept, because it seemed to me true as well, from all the reflection I had done, that the film board was in some sense the cultural conscience of this country.

● (0915)

[Translation]

It was the cultural conscience of this country. What the NFB offered to Canada, to Canadians and to the world was indispensable.

The technological environment provides many opportunities. It also presents a some risks. I strongly believe that expressing Canadian voices, particularly voices focused on public service, as much in traditional media as newer ones, is essential to maintaining Canadian diversity, individuality and identity. For this reason, there is an unquestionable obligation to protect, enrich and consolidate national public institutions such as the NFB.

I know that there will soon be a review of the National Film Board's mandate. At the NFB, we believe that any review of crown corporations and agencies working in the audiovisual sector must be undertaken in the greater context of the government's involvement in public policy in this sector.

The expertise of the NFB in all sectors of the industry as a producer, distributor, broadcaster and leader in terms of new creation technologies should be consulted in these reviews.

[English]

Recently the Conference Board of Canada indicated, in a rather dismal report about our performance in innovation, that we're lagging behind. We're 14th on the list of 17 countries.

I feel that what we've been doing at the film board has been really tackling questions of innovation from the point of view of our sector in terms of arts and culture, and again, that we've opened doors in terms of that, and that we've encouraged innovation. That is a unique role for a public sector producer—to be ahead of the pack and to open these kinds of doors in innovation and to set a kind of hallmark for that. We can partner and take risks that can't be taken solely by the private sector, and we can provide considerable expertise in bridging technology with creation.

I look forward to working with the committee during my mandate and in particular on this important review. Also—and this is something I feel strongly—as you are a committee so involved in the work of our cultural institutions, I would strongly invite you, if you have the chance, to come to the film board in Montreal,

[Translation]

to see the innovative work we are doing. We are working with Kent Nagano and Montreal's symphony orchestra to create something completely new: an IMAX 3D stereoscopic animation system.

3D stereoscopic animation is a new art form. Hollywood studios are starting to make similar films. Samsung has announced the release of the first 3D television this fall. We are ahead of the rest. We are creating an interactive film and all kinds of community projects. I would really like to show you the board's work, so that you can personally experience this innovation, and this creative laboratory.

Thank you very much.

● (0920)

[English]

I'm happy to answer your questions.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andy Scott): Thank you.

Mr. Scarpaleggia, you have five minutes.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Perlmutter, for appearing before the committee. All the members of the committee would gratefully accept your invitation to visit you at the NFB.

You have praised the achievements and strengths of the NFB. When a public institution praises its achievements, it is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, things are going well and there is reason to be proud, but on the other hand, one might say that there is perhaps no need for additional assistance.

What challenges are you facing and what are your financial and other needs for the future? Is your budget satisfactory?

Mr. Tom Perlmutter: When I came to the NFB, it was clearly experiencing an economic downturn. There had been no increase since the major cuts in 1996. We are making do with what we have now. It is a stressful situation, but somehow we are getting through with what we have. Even then, we see the positives, but we do not speak about cuts, about things we cannot do, etc.

When I think about the future, I think about two things. First of all, I intend to seriously examine our long-term costs. Can we lower costs? Is there a better way of doing things? I have experience in management and I have an MBA. So I am aware of these issues, but I also want to focus on creation. This is one path to investigate.

Second, the NFB has many assets and I do not know if they are being used to their full potential. This has yet to be seen. How can we be more entrepreneurial without contradicting our mandate, which is to serve the Canadian public?

Also, even if we find ways to obtain money by being entrepreneurial and ways to effectively make use of our assets, distribution is no longer simply traditional distribution. The world has changed drastically. So we are in the process of examining all of this.

But I think that if the government invests in the NFB, it is an investment in the future and not in the past. We must not say that we are investing now simply to maintain something. We must really invest for future innovation, digital technology, the future of all arts, culture, the

[English]

entertainment industry to become somehow a focal and crucial leverage point in terms of the future economic life of this country. To invest in the film board in terms of that means to invest in the future of Canada.

● (0925)

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: I think you have probably managed costs as best you can. There is perhaps not much more that can be done in this respect. It is mainly a question of investment.

But more concretely, if we gave you an additional \$20 million tomorrow, do you have any projects in mind? Which direction would you take things? Where would you invest that money?

Mr. Tom Perlmutter: I have had this job for one week. I cannot answer concretely in detail, but I can say that within five or six months I will have all these plans, because we are in the process of planning.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: But what would be the main focuses?

Mr. Tom Perlmutter: For me, the main focuses would be a real investment in digital technologies, for example, simply converting our works to digital. We have over 500,000 photos in our photo library and we have converted maybe 10%. This is an asset for all Canadians, but we cannot make use of it because we do not have the rights to do so, etc. This is an example of something that could really be a gift to Canadians, but it could also be an asset we could make use of in other ways. It is a small example, but it is something that—

It is a strategy we are just in the process of starting. For example, we must look at the whole question of innovation. I see it as an investment. We must think about the future of this industry and determine what the NFB can do that the private sector cannot, because it is too risky or because there is no business model.

[English]

I'll give you a case in point—

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: You are talking in terms of technology and not in terms of—

Mr. Tom Perlmutter: Not just in terms of technology.

[English]

I'll give you a concrete example of this. Two and a half years ago, as head of the English program, I decided that we would go ahead in a partnership with Bravo!FACT, which is a non-profit fund to aid artists, and create short films for cellphones, for mobile platforms. It's impossible to do in the private sector because there's no business model for it, there's no financially viable model. The technology, while very well advanced in Asia and in Europe in terms of having video downloads onto phones, didn't exist here.

We went ahead with this thing because we were doing a number of things. One, we were exploring possibilities of a new technology and saying that we could seize hold of this for Canadian creation. We were creating a new creative language around this, and we were bringing some of our leading filmmakers to this platform—from Quebec right through to western Canada, from eastern Canada, everywhere—to create a whole way of thinking about this.

Third, we were saying let's explore new kinds of partnerships so that we can at least start that work, which is going to be useful in the future to everyone in terms of business models. So exploring with the telcos, exploring... In fact, with the first experiment we did, it attracted so much attention worldwide that Sony Ericsson decided to become a partner in the second lot of production.

It wouldn't have happened, couldn't have happened any other way, but the fact is that it was the film board driving technological innovation and creation, the two together.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andy Scott): Monsieur Kotto.

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning. Thank you for being here.

In the past, in my other professional life, I had several opportunities to collaborate on productions within the NFB, but this is the first time we have met, since you were responsible for the English-language side of things.

Mr. Tom Perlmutter: That is true, but I have been at the NFB for five years. Before that, I worked in the private sector.

Mr. Maka Kotto: Okay.

I know it would be inappropriate for you to agree with us on this, but I would like to say something right off the bat. I would say that the NFB does not have the financial means to achieve its ambitions. When I compare it to the INA or Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, for example, which is its equivalent in France, and I see what that government does for that agency in order to create what you referred to as the cultural conscience of the country and a creative laboratory, I see that we are far from an ideal. But in France, they do not think they have yet achieved the ideal.

That said, what do you think the committee members should do to advise the minister on what I consider to be a declining structure because it receives little attention?

● (0930)

Mr. Tom Perlmutter: It is true that we are in a financial downturn. That is clear. We will take action to work with this situation. I can explain exactly what we want to do, as I did when I talked about what we plan on doing in the next six months. We can present a strategic and operational action plan and a rational business plan. I do not know whether this really affects you or not. There has been much talk within the industry. I think that there are clear economic benefits to this industry, and they need to be supported.

However, the NFB needs to make its views known, even though we have proven ourselves year after year. Since I became head of English programming, for example, we have been nominated for an Oscar four times. We have won twice. Our first nominations go back a number of years. We are everywhere, we have signed agreements, established relationships within communities, and we are creating fundamental links with Canadians. We are doing things that the private sector cannot do. We have a solid track record. I do not know what more we can do other than to continue to make our case.

If I look at the NFB and think about what we are, there are some things to reflect on about this institution. First of all, it has been

around since 1939. In 2009 the NFB will celebrate its 70th anniversary. I think this is a reason to celebrate. But how is this important?

[English]

This country is made up of its institutions—things like Parliament, parliamentary committees, the CBC, and the film board. What happens is that we've woven a fabric of a place that creates our unique identity in ways that aren't evident anywhere else. When you begin to let things slide and you unpick it and you don't, as it were, conserve that, you're doing something to the country, to the identity of this place, and to who we are as a people. This is not an argument for conserving the film board just because it has existed, but it's certainly one of the reasons that we have to think about it. We cannot consider lightly the film board. We must understand that it's become so fundamental in terms of the mindset of what Canada is.

Second, Canadians have invested almost 70 years in the film board. In commercial language, it's created one of the world's great brands. When I go around the world, I am received with such warmth and openness everywhere, because it's the National Film Board. The value of that to Canada is immeasurable.

Last week at Banff I received a letter from the second-in-command of all of NHK. NHK is one of the world's largest public broadcasters. I'm going to read you a portion of this letter. They were so grateful for what we did for them. They are an organization that is in the billions of dollars; we are an organization of \$70 million.

This is from Toyohiko Harada, who is the executive managing director of broadcasting. He was congratulating me. I did a presentation to them on how to connect with communities, because they were going through some problems. They were going through a financial crisis because of that. He says:

I'd like to thank you and the NFB for the help you gave us through the "Challenge for Change" presentations in Banff and Tokyo a couple of years ago. At that time, NHK was in serious financial trouble and had lost a great deal of public trust. But your message inspired us to work harder to reconnect with our audience. For example, our stations all over Japan have held more than 4,000 meetings with viewers and listeners in the past two years. Thanks to such initiatives, we're gradually regaining public trust.

● (0935)

[Translation]

It is unbelievable that one of the greatest public broadcasters in the world recognizes the NFB, but it is not recognized in our country.

Mr. Maka Kotto: Thank you. That is all.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andy Scott): *Merci, monsieur Kotto.*

Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): It's been fascinating listening to you this morning. I have long felt that the National Film Board is one of our great cultural treasures, and you speak very passionately about it. In fact, some of the successes you list were even surprising, I found.

At the outset, I do have to say that I think there has been a general parliamentary indifference to our cultural institutions over the last 15 years. Regardless of how careful you have to be because this is your first day before Parliament, I think it needs to be on the record that there is insufficient funding to realize the possibilities you have talked about, especially in the age of transforming platforms and where we need to go. It's not just at the film board; it's in all our cultural sectors, but it's at the film board in particular, because of its successes.

I see your background, and I don't think I need to question you on any of that. It seems to me that when we talk about the realm of possibility, the real success of the film board is the ability to take risks and to try emerging artists. If we don't have programs that allow emerging artists to experiment and bring their own odd point of view that no one else in an older generation might ever have seen, or that someone else might never have seen, we will never make great films. In order to do that, we need adequate funding, because it's risky to work with emerging artists.

I would like to base my questions this morning on what happens when you are looking at proposals from emerging artists. Is a move to digital easier to cost out and justify than the old analog film costs? What kind of support would you give? Is it technical support or script support, or do you just let them go out? How does the National Film Board work with an emerging artist on an emerging project?

Mr. Tom Perlmutter: That's a good question, because one of the pillars of programming at the film board is working with *la relève*. In fact, when I arrived at the National Film Board five and half years ago, I found a system that I thought wasn't working so well, because they were sort of thrown into the traditional, in documentary, one-hour documentary, or in animation, into auteur animation of seven or eight minutes. That's an enormous task for an emerging filmmaker to try to deal with. I thought it didn't do them a service, and it was costly.

So we put in place what we call our emerging filmmaker programs, and these are to work in short film. What was interesting—and I'll come back to this question of risk, because it touches on this—was that we were driven by a notion of how we actually get to have that sense of who the emerging artists are, where the talent is coming from, and how we give them the kind of *encadrement* support they need.

So we created a short film program. Everybody asked five years ago why we were doing short films, because no one was going to see them, and I said, don't worry; they'll be seen.

A number of things happened. First of all, we created short film programs. For example, in documentary momentum, it is a typical thing that we start by bringing people into workshops with the top people in the field. We allow them, then, to submit a proposal for a short film on a theme—a 10-minute film. We select it for those.... The key here, in terms of that transition from whatever background they come from, whether it's film school or another discipline, is to

surround them with the top talent, so they are being produced as if they were going to be doing a feature documentary. They have our top producers working with them. They have the top editors. They have the top cinematographers. Suddenly, their game is being lifted from the start by this process.

It's become world-class in terms of the programs we've created. We now have interest from around the world asking to model things. We've done that in animation. Where before, emerging artists were working three or four years to finish a film, they're finishing a short film of 30 seconds to one minute in three months through a hothouse program with the same thing—bringing in the top experts. This year in our hothouse, our partners in Brazil were so impressed they sent two young animators to take part and be part of that process. We've had queries from Korea about this. We're creating something different and terrific.

The kicker in all this, and this is what's interesting—I want to talk a little about risk-taking—is that short films have taken over the world. It started out with people asking why we were doing this, because it's not the traditional hour. Well, within the first year, our first short film documentary programs....

We did in fact partner with CBC Newsworld. They took it. But quickly, the web became the site. It's become the thing to have short films. We have the ability to market this all around the world and find audiences.

The way we take risks—and this is important, and it's what you can't do in the private sector, what Telefilm, for example, can't do and what CBC can't do.... If we're process-driven, if we understand what it is we want to do, whether it's with emerging filmmakers or with new art forms, we ask if we can define the process, if we can define how we want to think about something, but we don't define the end product. We don't define what we're going to end up with, because the moment you define the end product, you've closed off creation or possibility. If what you've done is say that we know already where we're going, you're not going to get any surprises, which means you're not going to get the magic. What we've found is that again and again we've been driven by a notion of process, and it's resulted in incredible pieces of work.

Now, with this emerging filmmaker program, we've had films go to Sundance; one went on to an Oscar nomination. It wouldn't have happened with predefined forms.

● (0940)

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andy Scott): Thank you.

We'll have Mr. Abbott for five minutes.

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Thank you very much for being here today.

I will admit that I am not nearly as conversant as I might be with exactly how the National Film Board works, and perhaps that's true of some of the other members of this panel.

You mentioned a number of times the issue of funding for the National Film Board, and I respect that, but help us to understand. You have a process—anybody has a process—of someone coming up with an idea, somebody deciding to produce it, looking for the assets to be able to produce it, be it a short film, a documentary or a feature film, the hiring of the crews, the paying of the crews, the editing and so on and so forth, and getting it to the other end where it's being advertised and distributed and where, hopefully, revenue is coming back in. So we have a vague understanding of what that growth process is.

Can you give us an idea of the funds the National Film Board has from the federal government, how they are spent? Describe for us the day-to-day, month-to-month, year-to-year functions that the National Film Board actually undertakes, say, in comparison with something like the Canadian Television Fund, which we do understand, or things of that nature.

Mr. Tom Perlmutter: We have a very different role.

I wish to make clear that the legislated mandate of the film board is to serve Canadians. It's not to be of direct assistance to an industry as such. So I'm very mindful of that, that everything we do has to be in service of Canadians, that we have to give value to Canadians. We have to do it in a way that operates in a kind of harmony and in interaction with the industry, that's certain, so we do it with the industry, and we do it with creators.

In terms of the functions, it's also a function of producing and distributing, and distributing in the wider sense means connecting with Canadians. You see, we're dealing with citizens. We're not dealing with, say, the traditional notion of delivering eyeballs to advertisers; we're dealing with the notion of engaging with the citizens of this country, by giving them access to points of view about their country from their fellow citizens that they might not otherwise hear. And how do we facilitate that beyond the production?

Now, even in terms of the production, it's not quite as simple as that, because what we do is to set ourselves strategic aims and goals in terms of the programming that drive what we do. Those strategic aims and goals don't mean we're simply going to sit there and say, okay, you're a filmmaker, you're going to come and give me a proposal. For example, the work we do in terms of emerging filmmakers—no one else does that, frankly. No one else has that level of interest to create a cinematic culture, to be able to develop and push that. What we've done is set that up. It wasn't that someone came to us and told us to do that; we said we have a responsibility here.

Our responsibility, another one, in terms of communities across the country, happened three years ago. I went up to Nunavut, and I think I was the first head of English production ever to do so. Nunavut has more artists per capita than anywhere in the world. They have an enormous graphic capability, and I thought we should work with them in terms of the film board existing for them as much as it does for communities in the south. What can we do with them? Can we work in animation? Can we give them a set of skills that will help us in terms of finding new forms of expression?

So we created a program, the Nunavut Animation Lab, which we did in partnership with IDC, with the Nunavut government, with

APTN, driven by us, and the whole notion of that gets also driven by a notion of sustainability. We set up workshops in communities. We did it in Cape Dorset, Iqaluit, and Pangnirtung. We find the people who really have that kind of talent and want to work in animation. We then made a partnership with the Banff Centre for the Arts, because they could do an *in situ* kind of apprenticeship in terms of finishing a work there within a location. What was also of great concern to us was bringing Inuit artists down to a metropolitan centre, for example, which would put enormous stress on them, so how do we kind of manage their being away from home?

We've created a pilot project that's going to do a number of things. It's going to create, I think, remarkable animation. It's going to enrich our country. It certainly enriches our cultural institutions. But we've also thought about what happens afterwards. We've trained people to work on the computers, the digital animation and all of that, which stays up in the north. That means they can start to build an economically viable industry in the sense that when the government needs a PSA, or when they need to do local advertising, they can start to do that and deliver that themselves.

Those are the kinds of areas where we're spending significant sums of money. We're doing that in the Yukon. We're doing it in the Northwest Territories. We were doing it when we recently launched—which is not production—a pilot project, digital cinema in Caraquet, New Brunswick. We're seeking ways to give to smaller communities the experience of cinema, the experience of the works that we produce and others produce that is not normally seen in these small communities, in a theatrical setting. With digital cinema, we've spent and invested a significant sum of money to be able to do this and we've tested it out. The response in that community was, "My God, we are not forgotten; we are remembered by a federal institution", which is remarkable. Now, we're going to expand that to four or five communities in New Brunswick in the fall.

● (0945)

Some of the range of projects are Cinematheque and our Mediatheque and our CineRobotheque in Montreal. We have literally 100,000 school kids going through there, learning animation. So I could keep going on in terms of the level of media literacy, the level of engagement with what it means, with both creation and also a national federal institution that says, this is Canada, and Canada is giving you real value.

● (0950)

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andy Scott): Thank you, Mr. Abbott.

Before I go to Mr. Scarpaleggia, let me say that I'm very aware of the efforts in New Brunswick. I think a former member of the film board is teaching at St. Thomas or UNB in film, and my son is a student of Giles Walker at UNB.

Mr. Scarpaleggia.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Thank you.

I have a couple of quick questions about distribution.

I think it's safe to say that all of us here on this committee follow cultural issues and we're interested in cultural product. Yet I find that as a Canadian, as a member of the Canadian heritage committee of the House of Commons, I see so little of your fabulous production. You know, quite frankly, I see very little of it on television.

I know there's a movie channel that now is playing some Norman McLaren shorts, and it's great, but we're going back 40 years. And we used to see NFB shorts before feature films in cinemas, and that created a lot of pride on behalf of moviegoers.

I'm just wondering whether you are doing enough to get your product in mainstream venues, whether it be television or cinema halls. Should it not be a priority to try to strengthen the bonds between the CBC and the NFB and any other outlets? I think that's a big issue.

I'm hard pressed to find an NFB production. Maybe it's on the Internet somewhere. But the average person who wants to sit down and watch some cultural product... You're already in a relaxed state; you don't say to yourself, "I'm going to run downtown to an NFB outlet." As a matter of fact, you still have one downtown. You used to have one in Ottawa. It was closed, and now there's a café there.

So it really concerns me that this great work is happening and Canadians aren't seeing it unless they really look for it. So I'd like you to address that.

Secondly, I know there are great filmmakers across the country, and I think your initiative in Nunavut is fabulous. My riding is in western Montreal, and I represent a good portion of the anglophone community in Montreal. What is the state of the English-speaking cinematographic community? I have producers who live in my riding, and they can't get funding for great films. These are very talented people. Is enough being done for, say, filmmakers in minority language communities, and more specifically in this case, in the English part of Quebec?

Mr. Tom Perlmutter: I'll take the distribution question first.

You know, it's an enormous preoccupation for us. I will say that nearly everything gets on television. But when you sit down in front of your television and you have the 100-plus channels, depending on your various cable packages, the fact that 90% of what we do gets on television...it's hard to say, "Oh, that's the film board right there".

Now, we've had a great—

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: But I'm talking the CBC now. I'm not talking—

Mr. Tom Perlmutter: No, no, but even with CBC, when they're looking at—right now we're in discussions again with CBC. So many of the things we do end up on CBC, but I have to tell you they also end up—I looked at a list of things we're doing with Global, and over the last two years they've opened up their ability to do documentaries, and 10 different films we're doing will go on to Global.

We work with CTV as well, and we work with TVOntario, with Knowledge Network. In terms of films, in terms of audiences, I don't have the precise figures; I'll say it's getting out there, but there is a problem. The problem is that in the flow of television, the particularity of the kind of work the film board can bring in terms

of that level of attention and interchange and interactivity, which is important, may sometimes get lost. And I'm coming to some solutions as well in a second.

The second thing we're doing, and you'll have seen this, is that our films are now starting and will increasingly be visible in theatres. Recently we did a film, *Manufactured Landscapes*, which premiered at the Toronto Film Festival last year. It's a co-production, a beautiful feature film. It did, for a feature documentary that's an art house doc, about \$600,000 in theatrical screenings across Canada. It was released through a deal with Mongrel Media. It's about to be released in the States theatrically. It was at the Sundance Festival, and quite possibly may be on an Oscar run hereafter.

We've done other films that have done remarkably well. *Radiant City*, which is a film out of Calgary, was released across the country to great critical press. Again, it had the attention. People were aware of it. It was available for people in their communities across the country.

As for what remains to be done in terms of this and where we have enormous opportunity to connect with Canadians more directly, we're going to probably look at having something much more direct in the coming months. I hope we'll be able to announce something sometime later in the autumn—direct accessibility through all sorts of non-exclusive deals on various platforms on the net, so if you want to have that experience, you can go to your favourite kind of site, whether it's Joost or Babelgum or Brightcove or the NFB site, definitely. We're going to create ways that Canadians can access us on all sorts of platforms, and we'll make sure we're present, because we owe it to them, and I'm very cognizant of that. That's going to happen.

As for the second question, we have a vibrant production centre. The programming is divided into production centres. We have a production office in each of Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, and Halifax. Montreal's is an animation studio. This is an English program, and there's the documentary studio and new media studio. The doc studio spends something like, with our limited funds, \$2 million working with English-language filmmakers, mainly in Montreal, doing a range of work, from emerging filmmakers to very experienced filmmakers.

There will always be good projects we can't do because our resources are limited. At the end of the day, we're in the process of having to make tough choices all the time. But I'd say the anglo community in Montreal is well served by the film board.

●(0955)

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andy Scott): Madame Bourgeois.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, Mr. Perlmutter.

• (1000)

Mr. Tom Perlmutter: Good morning.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I really like your philosophy. Your eloquent speech on culture was very different from the many other speeches we have heard here. We are currently examining the mandate of the CBC, and talks often revolve around finances. We are always trying to get back to culture. You are using cultural language when you say that the NFB is the country's cultural conscience.

I was a high school teacher for 30 years and there was not a single school in my school board that had never worked with the National Film Board. The Board is a great source for teaching resources, for history just as much as French. It is a gold mine for schools, but it is not always well known. Making a speech just about finances when talking about the National Film Board gives people the wrong idea. We must think about the cultural benefits for the public and for our youth.

That said, you seem quite conscious of expressing cultural diversity as well, which I think is great. Our committee has visited various Canadian towns and the people do not necessarily relate to television. If NFB services were more available, perhaps they would relate a little more.

I have three questions for you. You spoke about planning. What I am asking could represent work to be done in the long term. In six months, you could maybe give us a strategic plan. This could cover a number of things, including the National Film Board's current situation, so that my colleagues who are not familiar with the services offered by the NFB can become familiar with them. That is very important.

What are you currently doing with the budget you are given? You plan on getting the National Film Board out there. I would like you to talk about what you are aiming for, with dates. You said that in two years the NFB would celebrate its 70th anniversary. There can be dates for the different steps and performance indicators. It would be very important to know how the Conservative government can benefit from planning or from what the National Film Board should be.

I know that that is a lot of work for you, but you seem very competent and I think you will be able to do this for us.

You were head of the NFB's English programming. Do the different branches face different challenges? There is also the francophone sector.

Do you think that documentaries receive enough support in Canada? Should there be more support? Do you think that documentary filmmakers can be satisfied with what the government is currently contributing?

Mr. Tom Perlmutter: Thank you.

First, with respect to planning, for almost a year we have been reviewing everything related to performance indicators. This is very important to us for a number of reasons. Every day, I am very conscious of the fact that it is a privilege to be there to serve the Canadian public. This privilege comes with the enormous responsibility of always delivering the goods. When I worked in the private

sector, I saw both sides and I was very aware of the importance of what we were doing. We must always question ourselves and justify what we are doing based on indicators. It is a process. We can come back in the coming months to report on progress. I would be very happy to do so, as well as to update you on our planning.

I do not know if that answers all your questions about planning.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Planning is important, since it shows where we are and what we are doing with the budgets. What is the focus now and why? Planning makes it possible for us to give explanations, to say what benefits this will have and to justify the money invested.

Mr. Tom Perlmutter: I started last week. We will get back to this, but the process has already started. There are things we are looking at; our broad outlines are clear. I am new to the job, and everything we are doing is possible because my predecessor did great work. Jacques Bensimon, when he was commissioner, really reinvented the place. Now, it is up to us to move forward and that is what we are doing. We will see how we can get there and we will explain the details within about six months.

The francophone branch is very important to me, in a way, perhaps even more so than the anglophone one. Having this voice is important to the NFB. When I was head of English programming, I did my best and we did a lot of work together. We ensured that there were talks between the sectors about creativity, ideas and reflection. We made sure that we were strengthening our forces. We worked on specific projects and major challenges. For example, I organized master classes for our employees and producers to improve their skills. I invited the greatest documentary filmmakers to the NFB by encouraging them to do some in-depth work. Along with the French program we did something new.

• (1005)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andy Scott): And what is the third question?

[Translation]

Mr. Tom Perlmutter: I worked for years in the documentary world. I can tell you that documentary filmmakers, by nature, are never satisfied. That is the way they are. There are always problems in the world and society is always facing challenges. But there are specific challenges in terms of funding for feature-length documentaries. We currently have a pilot project with Telefilm Canada and the CBC. There is no way to truly ensure long-term funding. Another problem is how to create a funding model for documentaries created on new platforms? This involves other ways of doing things. That does not currently exist. So there are problems related to that as well.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andy Scott): *Merci beaucoup.*

Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Thank you very much.

Congratulations, Mr. Perlmutter, on your appointment. Obviously you're well qualified going into the position, so we'd like to congratulate you on that as well.

We've heard testimony previously, and I hope I've got the statistic correct, but the understanding was that of the films produced by the National Film Board, many are only viewed by 2% of the population. You did talk about performance indicators and a requirement that you live by performance indicators as you go into this position. I'm wondering if you believe that 2% is a good number, or if that's a number you think should be used as an indicator of performance, and if that number should rise or fall.

What's your perspective on that?

Mr. Tom Perlmutter: I'm not sure what that 2% refers to, first of all. If we're talking about simply ratings and it's coming from broadcast figures, I'd say it's questionable. I'd have to do the analysis. Frankly, no, 2% ain't good. It ain't good enough for me. It's not something I would be happy about. But I would challenge the figure and I would say we are getting audiences that are much larger than that, but they're audiences that are not being recorded anywhere. We go across the country and we have screenings. I'll give you one example that's not recorded anywhere.

We did a film a couple of years ago called *Being Caribou*. It's a remarkable film. Two young filmmakers—one filmmaker, a husband and wife team—decided to see what it meant for the Porcupine caribou herd when there was talk of oil drilling in their calving grounds, so they walked on foot from September through April following this herd, going on this route.

This film was picked up by the Alaska Wilderness Society and others. They organized what were called "living room screenings", in which they sent out 2,000 copies, DVDs, and individuals then organized parties where they invited 10 to 20 people into their living rooms. We were told that out of that alone, probably on one night 300,000 people watched it. It's not recorded anywhere. It's not in that figure. I'd say that happens again and again in terms of our films, that we touch and connect with audiences in ways that our systems for recording just aren't there.

Having said that, I still don't think we're where we should be, but we have plans, and very ambitious plans. Hopefully with the support of this committee and hopefully with the kinds of investments that we can get in our future, we will be in every home directly, online, every day.

• (1010)

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Well, that's absolutely wonderful. That's what I was hoping to hear, so we appreciate your efforts thus far. Obviously it's only been a week, but we do wish you the best of luck in your adventure.

I think Mr. Brown has a couple of follow-up questions.

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Warkentin.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andy Scott): Mr. Brown.

Mr. Gord Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Congratulations on your appointment, sir. I just have one question really.

In the 38th Parliament this committee undertook a study of the feature film industry, and Mr. Angus and I were involved in that. Have you had a chance to read that report?

Mr. Tom Perlmutter: No, I haven't.

Mr. Gord Brown: I'd highly recommend that you do. A lot of the issues that have been discussed today in fact were covered in that. The committee went across the country. I think there are some good recommendations in there.

Mr. Tom Perlmutter: I will be looking at it. It's in the pile on my desk. Thank you.

Mr. Gord Brown: All right. Congratulations.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andy Scott): Thank you very much.

I think everyone else is finished, with the exception of Mr. Angus. So I'll give the last round to Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you.

I was fascinated when hearing my colleague Madame Bourgeois talk about its use in school, because I can attest that when I was growing up we saw National Film Board films more times than I can remember, and even at church outings they showed us National Film Board shows. So we grew up consistently on it.

Again, I want to reiterate my opinion that the National Film Board continues to transform in the new millennium, because our young audience is much different from the audience when I was in school.

I recently saw *Last Round*, the George Chuvalo documentary. I think that's one of the best documentaries I've seen in memory.

I saw another National Film Board film that may have slipped under a lot of people's radars: *Harvest Queens*. I was very touched by that film because it actually takes place in my region. My wife and I used to always say that the harvest queen fall fair pageant would make a great documentary, but we never expected that anybody ever would do it. I live in northern Ontario, and nobody ever covers our stories, which is why we grew up loving hockey, because it was the only time we ever saw our place mentioned; we had Frank Mahovlich or Steve Sullivan or someone else. But nobody seemed to bother to come north to celebrate what we had. That film was a very poignant film. If we didn't have the film board, a film like that would never have been made, as far as I can see.

I just want to put that on the record—

Mr. Tom Perlmutter: I'd just say that *Harvest Queens* came out of our emerging filmmaker program.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Did it? Well, it was an excellent film.

I'm interested in, again, the issue of reaching young people, the move to short films, because young people watch short films, because they watch everything on YouTube. My daughters e-mail little clips to each other about all kinds of stuff. The bandwidth prefers short, and so they are accustomed to short.

I want to talk about that and ask you about your future direction on online content, because one of the big problems we've seen in terms of getting our immense Canadian catalogue online is how to monetize it. National Film Board has been pointed to as a model again and again, partly because I think, with the copyright issues, you have easier access to your own catalogue than some of our other institutions that are a little more challenged. But are there viable models out there to monetize the contents so that our filmmakers can actually see some return on being present all the time, anywhere, when anyone wants to see it, on a cellphone, a shoe phone, or on YouTube?

• (1015)

Mr. Tom Perlmutter: I'll come to that. I just want to say something about northern Ontario and one of the things we're looking at.

In various ways, it has been very important for me to reach out to communities. In fact, the week after my nomination was made, for example, other colleagues would have been on the golden sands at Cannes, while I was up at the tar sands in Fort McMurray, because I felt that it was important in terms of connecting to a community and seeing what was going on, and it's a place that has enormous importance for the country and the world. So it has always been important for me to reach out.

We're also looking in terms of our new technologies and saying, how do we create, say, virtual edit rooms—we talked about this in terms of northern Ontario, with my Ontario studio—so that we can have filmmakers working at a distance, because of the technology allowing things, so that we can reach out and be deeply connected to the talent everywhere.

I just want to say another thing about this, which I don't think gets expressed enough. When we say we reach out to the talent across the world or to cultural diversity or to other groups, it's not because we're checking off the boxes that it's right to do so, although it is right to do so. We strongly believe that what we're doing is enriching who we are, that we need this rejuvenation from these other voices, and that what we're doing is enriching Canada as a result of that, by bringing a whole set of other ways of looking at the world that we might not otherwise see, a way of thinking and feeling, and the level of creative energy that can be released by tapping into a community, whether it's a northern community or whether it's an Inuit or aboriginal community, or working with the black community in Montreal or in Vancouver, or elsewhere. It's tremendous, and I think no one else can do that but the film board.

I'm sorry, I'm going to go back to the question of short films monetizing.

It's still a big question in terms of that and how you monetize that. My own thinking at this point is, in creating that kind of way, how do we give back to Canadians what they've invested so they have some kind of access, in any case, to the films they've invested in through the film board?

Maybe it's through some kind of streaming, and then if they want to own, they can buy it. What we've been hearing in terms of models out there is that this has been working very successfully. In fact, revenues increase for people in terms of being able to have things available on a range of platforms.

There's nothing that has yet seen a viable business model that becomes part of a whole production financing mechanism that you can kind of look at and then it will flow back in. These are things that different kinds of people, from the major players in the world, the big studios, to smaller players, are looking at. I said earlier that I want to look at how we can be entrepreneurial and look at exploiting our materials, partly looking at that and finding different ways of doing that. Frankly, looking at that whole world, the online world and what gets monetized, do you know what the biggest business is, the biggest money earner in terms of audio-visual media? It's ring tones and screen savers. It's a billion-dollar business—very interesting.

Merci.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andy Scott): *Merci beaucoup.*

Let me just add my own personal enthusiasm for the National Film Board. I'm certain that *Echoes in the Rink: The Willie O'Ree Story* has played in every school classroom in Fredericton, showing up in no ratings anywhere.

I was sitting here thinking about it, and I think I know of five people who are in film specifically as a result of that exercise. For those who don't know, this is another hockey story; Mr. O'Ree was the first black man to play in the NHL. He was out of Fredericton.

Kudos to you and to all who have come before you. Hopefully the committee can support you in your passion. It is obvious and encouraging. Congratulations on your appointment.

As we have heard everyone congratulate you, it may not be necessary for us to express our formal confidence, but it is a part of the process. I would accept a mover—and I see Mr. Angus—for the motion, which is that the committee has examined the qualifications and competence of Tom Perlmutter for the position of government film commissioner of the National Film Board of Canada, that it finds him competent to perform the duties of the position he has been appointed to, and that the chair report that to the House.

I see nodding approval, so I think we can fairly say that this is the unanimous position of our committee.

(Motion agreed to)

• (1020)

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andy Scott): Congratulations to anyone who can bring unanimity to this fine group. Thank you.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andy Scott): The meeting is adjourned.

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